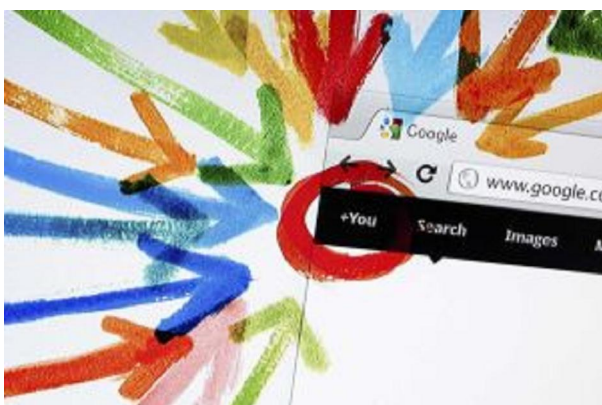**Newsday**

Rubell: Google's compiling a file on you

March 12, 2012 by PAUL RUBELL

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At the beginning of the month, Google implemented a new "privacy" policy that dramatically decreased your privacy while significantly increasing what the search engine giant knows about you. This sweeping act has demolished the thin protective wall previously offered by individual privacy policies.

Unlike before, Google now may cross-reference user information generated by your Gmail account against your keyword searches or your YouTube account, or any other Google product.

Google implemented this policy, which decompartmentalizes the data of its estimated 300 million daily users, over the objections of 36 attorneys general (including New York's Eric Schneiderman) and howling opposition from European Union and Japanese government officials.

In February, the Electronic Privacy Information Center, a consumer watchdog that has often sparred with Google over privacy concerns, brought suit against the Federal Trade Commission to prevent the new privacy policy from taking effect. Specifically, the group sought to compel the FTC to enforce an October consent order that, in part, "forbids misleading or deceptive privacy changes."

Unfortunately, the judge ruled the courts don't "have the authority to tell the FTC how to regulate Google." Meanwhile, the FTC has not disclosed whether Google's new privacy policy has complied with its October consent order.

Despite all the opposition, Google maintains its new policy is a good thing. While it's certainly good for the company and its stockholders, it's doubtful that it's good for the users.

By unifying privacy policies governing 60 Google products and services, one company may now capture and store information about you across multiple platforms and on a scale and depth previously unimaginable. The policy has the effect of authorizing the corporation to generate, capture and store information revealing, among other things, your name, email address, dorm room, where you go for vacation, which ATM you use, what clothing you buy, what music you like, what your political views are, when and where you use your computer, and what kind of phone you use -- all in one place. Previous product-specific privacy policies kept this information separate.

Having all this data in one place allows Google to offer advertisers more personal ads with more data-specific targeting. It also means, as some have noted, "Google will know more about you than your spouse does."

Some may say that using these products and services is optional, and that may be true. But the Internet is "optional" today the way electricity and gas are "optional." And no genuine "opt-out" choice exists for users of Google; the data sharing is not "optional." It is done.

Those who shared their online lives through Google before the adoption of this new policy are now along for the ride -- or, as the attorneys general pointed out in a letter to Google chief executive Larry Page, "their personal information [is] 'held hostage' within the Google ecosystem."

Users' only real recourse is to log off Gmail regularly, so that the user information generated to their IP addresses is not attached to their email addresses, and to close browsers when finished -- or to use other products and services.

It's one thing for Apple to know what music you download; or Abercrombie to know what clothing you like and where you live. But do we really want one company to know everything?

Google's claim that its new privacy policy is to make browsing "beautifully simple" is true for them -- the company can now mine and interpret your personal information across dozens of areas without the data separation that remained the last protection of your habits and identity. For Google, that's a beautiful thing. For users, it's not that simple.

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